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## More than Agca in the dock

Mehmet Ali Agca says he's the resurrected Jesus, a surprising announcement from a man who shot the pope, but plenty of people will know what to make of it. "Agca's crazy" sums up the emerging defense of the alleged co-conspirators, named by Agca, in the assassination attempt. If he's wrong about being Jesus, it will be said, he must be wrong about the rest.

Admittedly, Agca is far from the perfect witness. He has switched his testimony, even conceding that he picked up some details from newspapers and television accounts after he was jailed. If that's not enough to strain credibility, he not only shot the pope, but also was convicted of murdering a Turkish editor in 1979. A more unreliable witness could hardly be found, and defense lawyers for Sergei Antonov, the only Bulgarian suspect in Italian custody, must have been rapturous at the claim of divinity.

But Agca is hardly the only liar on trial. Mr. Antonov, accused of driving the would-be assassin to St. Peter's Square, used to insist that language limitations prevented his communication with Agca. Investigators soon discovered that Mr. Antonov misrepresented his linguistic skills. He initially told Italian authorities that he could remember nothing of the day of the shooting, yet three weeks later produced six witnesses who swore he was with them the day the pope was shot.

As for the missing defendants, being tried in absentia, so convinced are they of their innocence that they refuse to show them-

selves in Rome. They say the trial will go against them by design, but the facts probably do not leave them sanguine either.

Italian investigators, far from relying entirely on the testimony of a liar, spent three painstaking years collecting evidence before calling for a trial. Nothing Agca said was taken on faith. Startling revelations are expected at the trial — from, for example, defector Jordan Mantarov, formerly a commercial attache at the Bulgarian Embassy in Paris, but believed to have been a high-ranking member of Bulgarian intelligence. He is said to have told French authorities that the pontiff's support of Poland's Solidarity movement led the KGB and Bulgarian intelligence, its pawn, to discuss "a way to eliminate John Paul II."

If Italian prosecutors are successful, the effects on East-West relations could be vast. Maryknoll nuns might think twice about supporting the Sandinistas if it were established that Daniel Ortega's sponsors meant to kill the pope. Even Speaker Tip O'Neill, whose chief adviser on Central America is one of the sisters, might be jarred. These possibilities and others explain why the Soviets are fulminating and why such tight security measures have been employed. Five hundred policemen would hardly be needed inside and outside the courtroom if Agca were merely the loony the East Bloc would like us to believe.